

SESSION 2

YOU ARE GOD'S MASTERPIECE

We are the work of his hands, you and I. Which is to say, we are roughly quarried stone on our way to becoming the magnum opus of God, the “great work” of his life. The work he thinks of, dreams of. The work he frets over, obsesses over. We are a masterpiece in the making. And not just any masterpiece. His masterpiece.

KEN GIRE, *SHAPED BY THE CROSS*

Group Discussion: Checking In (5 Minutes)

Welcome to Session 2 of *Altar Ego*. A key part of getting to know God better is sharing your journey with others. Before watching the video, briefly check in with each other about your experiences since the last session. For example:

- What insights did you discover in the personal study or in the chapters you read from the *Altar Ego* book?
- How did the last session impact your daily life or your relationship with God?
- What questions would you like to ask the other members of your group?

Video: You Are God's Masterpiece (10 Minutes)

Play the video segment for Session 2. As you watch, use the accompanying outline to follow along or to take notes on anything that stands out to you.

Notes

Without Christ, there is a lot wrong with us.

With Christ, we are God's masterpiece.

“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:8–10 NLT).

We're not saved by the good works we do; we're saved by God to do good works.

Two things to think about:

1. As God's masterpiece, you were created for a purpose.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:13 – 16).

If you want to know the purpose of a thing, don't ask the thing; ask the one who created the thing.

Ask God, *What have you created me to do?*

2. You have everything you need to do everything God wants you to do.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3).

The problem is, we focus on what we can't do instead of what we can do. We focus on what we are not, instead of on what we are.

Through Christ, you can be the masterpiece created for the Master's purpose.

Group Discussion (40 Minutes)

Take a few minutes to talk about what you just watched.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

The Divine Artist

2. The biblical writers use many images for God (for example: father, judge, king, shepherd, advocate). In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul uses the image of God as an *artist*, a creator of beauty in human beings:

For we are God's *masterpiece*. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago (Ephesians 2:10 NLT, emphasis added).

- What comes to mind when you imagine God as an artist? In contrast with other biblical images, how does this image reveal something unique about who God is and how God works?

 - In what ways, if any, would you say you have recently experienced God as an artist — someone who works to create goodness and beauty in you?
3. The Greek word translated in the Ephesians passage as “masterpiece” is the noun *poiema* (poy'-ay-mah). In literal translation it means “what is made, work, creation.”¹ A Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint often uses the verb form of *poiema* (*poieo*) to describe God's creative activity in the world:

Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, *working* wonders? (Exodus 15:11, emphasis added)

Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone *does* marvelous deeds (Psalm 72:18, emphasis added).

1. Friedrich Thiele, “*poiema*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, Colin Brown, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, 1986), 1152.

This is the day the LORD has *made*. We will rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24 NLT, emphasis added).

He *performs* wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted (Job 5:9, emphasis added).

In these verses, God’s work is “masterpiecing.” He masterpieces everything he creates — from an ordinary day to marvelous deeds, unfathomable wonders, and countless miracles.

- Consider an experience of masterpiecing in your own life — a project or event that was important to you and to which you devoted an extraordinary amount of time, resources, and effort. It could be anything — creating an art project, writing music, restoring a vintage car, planning a wedding, etc. Briefly describe the impact this project had on you during the process. For example, how did it change what you thought about, how you felt, how you spent your time, how you related to others, etc. What kind of thoughts or feelings did you have about the project itself?

- What insights does your experience of working on this project or event provide about God’s masterpiecing work in human beings — how he “creates us anew in Christ Jesus”?

Created for a Purpose

4. Without Christ, Scripture confirms that we are not only lost but without purpose:

All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one (Romans 3:12 NLT).

With Christ, we share a common purpose: to love God and love others (Matthew 22:37–40) by doing “the good things [God] planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10 NLT). God also gives each of us a distinct purpose—specific gifts enabling us to fulfill God’s unique call on our lives (Romans 12:6).

Which of the statements below comes closest to your current perspective about your gifts and purpose? Share the reasons for your response.

- I am clear about my gifts and actively engaged in living out my purpose.
- I have a good idea about my gifts and am taking steps to live out my purpose more fully.
- I am somewhat uncertain about my gifts and my purpose seems to change during different seasons of my life. Sometimes I feel like I am living out my purpose and other times I wonder if I’ve missed it.
- I am in a process of discovery. I am trying to figure out what my gifts are and how to live out my purpose.
- I am unclear about my gifts and I struggle when it comes to knowing my purpose and living it out.
- Other: _____

5. Following are five verses that shed light on what it means to live with purpose. Go around the group and have a different person read each passage aloud. As the passages are read, underline or highlight any words or phrases that stand out to you. You may wish to read through the list twice to give everyone time to listen and respond.

If you keep growing in this way, it will show that what you know about our Lord Jesus Christ has made your lives useful and meaningful (2 Peter 1:8 CEV).

God chose you, and we keep praying that God will make you worthy of being his people. We pray for God's power to help you do all the good things that you hope to do and that your faith makes you want to do (2 Thessalonians 1:11 CEV).

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (John 15:8).

Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless (1 Corinthians 15:58 NLT).

Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

- Which of the five verses stands out most to you? Why?

- The verse from 2 Peter affirms lives that are “useful and meaningful.” In what area of your life right now do you have the strongest sense of feeling useful and meaningful? What connections, if any, do you make between this area of your life and your unique gifts and purpose? (If you struggle to identify an area of life in which you have a strong sense of feeling useful and meaningful, describe the area of life in which you sense the greatest need to feel useful and meaningful. How do you hope God might work in you to change this area of your life?)

Everything You Need

6. Even when we're uncertain about our unique gifts and purpose, Scripture affirms that God has already provided everything we need to live for him:

God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8).

We have everything we need to live a life that pleases God. It was all given to us by God's own power, when we learned that he had invited us to share in his wonderful goodness. God made great and marvelous promises, so that his nature would become part of us (2 Peter 1:3 – 4a CEV).

- Which number on the continuum below best describes your perspective? Share the reasons for your response.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<p>I feel like I am missing something or that my circumstances need to be different in order to live my best life for God.</p>					<p>No matter what my circumstances are, I feel like I have everything I need to live my best life for God.</p>				

- Briefly identify an area of life (for example: a difficult relationship, a complex problem, a temptation or sin pattern, an urgent need, an emotional wound, etc.) in which you are most aware of feeling like you don't have what you need to live a life that pleases God. Overall, how do the passages from 2 Corinthians and 2 Peter impact how you feel about this issue? Do they encourage you or discourage you? Why?
7. At the end of the group discussion for Session 1, you had the opportunity to share what you need from the other members of the group, and to write down the best ways you can be good companions to one another.
- Briefly restate what you asked for from the group in Session 1. What changes or clarifications would you like to make that would help the group know more about how to be a good companion to you? As each person responds, add any additional information to the Session 1 chart. (If you were absent from the last session, share your response to Session 1 question 7. Then use the chart to write down what is important to each member of the group.)

- In what ways, if any, did you find yourself responding differently to other members of the group in this session based on what they asked for in the previous session? What made that easy or difficult for you to do?

Individual Activity: What I Want to Remember (2 Minutes)

1. Briefly review the outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant thing you gained in this session — from the teaching, activities, or discussions.

What I want to remember from this session ...

Closing Prayer

Close your time together with prayer.

Personal Study

● Read and Learn

Read chapters 2–4 of the *Altar Ego* book. Use the space below to note any insights or questions you want to bring to the next group session.

● Study and Reflect

By ourselves, we'll never be enough. But once we surrender our lives to God, everything about us—including our mistakes and weaknesses—becomes the raw material for his masterpiece.

Altar Ego, page 34

1. Every good creation begins as raw material. No matter how messed up our lives may be when we surrender ourselves to God, he uses all the material we give him to remake us into something whole and beautiful:

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago (Ephesians 2:10 NLT).

For a fresh perspective on this familiar verse, consider it again in these alternate versions:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (ESV).

We are his design; God has created us in Christ Jesus, pledged to such good actions as he has prepared beforehand, to be the employment of our lives (KNOX).

[God] creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing (MSG).

The Greek verb translated as “created/creates” is *ktizō* (ktid'-zo). It is used by New Testament writers to describe creative work that only God can do (see for example Mark 13:9; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16, 3:10). More specifically, it means to “make or create something which has not existed before.”²

What comes to mind when you reflect on the work that God has already done in your life? For example, what is it that is true about your identity or your life that did not exist before you gave your life to Christ?

Where are you most aware of a need for God to do something completely new in you now?

The purpose of God’s creative work is that we “walk” in the good work he has prepared for us. The Greek verb the ESV translates as “walk in” is *peripateō* (per-ee-pat-eh'-o), and it is used here to describe not just actions but a way of life — one that stands in stark contrast to the “trespasses and sins in which you once *walked*,” which is our old way of life (Ephesians 2:1 ESV, emphasis added). It is this lifestyle of walking-around goodness that is our lifelong “employment.”

2. J. P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, “Make, Create,” 42.35, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Second Edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989), 514.

Briefly reflect on your activities and relationships over the last twenty-four hours. To what degree would you say your behaviors and interactions were characterized by walking-around goodness? Circle the number on the continuum that best describes your response.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<p>My behaviors and interactions were characterized primarily by my old way of life.</p>					<p>My behaviors and interactions were characterized primarily by my new way of life.</p>				

If you could do the day over again, what would you change? For example, what would you do more of (and what would you do less of) to reflect more of God's goodness in your behaviors and interactions?

God decided that ... this was the single point ideally suited for you to serve him and bring him glory. Out of all the nearly infinite possibilities, there was no better time for you to be born with your unique gifts, talents, skills, and personality. God knew you before you were, and he put you right where he wanted you.

Altar Ego, pages 37–38

2. God saves us so we can make a difference and bring glory to him. Consider these two compelling statements Jesus makes that reveal something about what it means to bring glory to God:

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8).

“[Father,] I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4).

Briefly consider the things that are difficult or unknowns for you right now. If everything about those circumstances were to remain unchanged for the foreseeable future, how would it impact your understanding of what it means to bring glory to God in your life right now? How do you imagine it might diminish or increase your ability to bear much fruit and do the work God has given you to do right where you are?

Bringing glory to God is not about gritty self-effort, trying really hard to be good, or merely keeping busy with good activities; it's about joining God in the work he is already doing — especially the work he is doing in us:

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think (Ephesians 3:20 NLT).

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him (Philippians 2:13 NLT).

What is the “more than” you hope God might do *in* you? How do you hope it might enable God to do more *through* you?

In what circumstance, decision, or relationship are you most aware of needing a greater desire or more power to do what pleases God?

Believing that you are precisely where God wants you to be right now, what is something only you could do to bring God glory within the next twenty-four hours?

● Guided Prayer

God, thank you for your creative work in my life, for taking what is hard and broken about me and shaping it into a masterpiece.

I know I will always be a work in process — I still have hard and broken pieces that need the creative work that only you can do. Please create something new in me, specifically in connection with . . . I need your help because . . .

I know that you want me to be fruitful, but I'm not always certain if I'm doing the work you've given me to do, both now and in the future. Right now, I ask for guidance about . . . For the future, I ask for guidance about . . .

Lord, I know that every day is full of opportunities for walking-around goodness. Every day I can be fruitful in loving and serving the people you bring into my life. Please give me a greater desire and more power to do what pleases you so that I can complete the work you have given me to do. Amen.